

THEATRE

DARK NOON

FIX+FOXY



FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL

29 May–1 June
Halle G
MuseumsQuartier

If history is a narrative that is written by the victors, then *Dark Noon* is a rousing anti-narrative. It tells the story of America as a race for land, gold and wealth. It is a deadly journey: in this place, those in pursuit of happiness in the name of God pay no heed to the lives of others. It is narrated by those who know exactly what it means to be colonised. In real time, an extraordinary cast of South African actors build a Western town – a bar, saloon, gold mine, railway, church and plenty of shoot-outs included. Brimming with irony, anger and unbridled energy, they recount the westward flight of 35 million impoverished and starving Europeans in search of a second chance. The award-winning Danish director Tue Biering and the South African co-director and choreographer Nhlanhla Mahlangu achieve an explosive theatre experience that mocks Hollywood at the same time as delivering an untamed chronicle of Western civilisation.

Language
English

Surtitles
German

Duration
105 mins.


barrier-free access

Q & A
31 May, following
the performance

'It is important that we are looking at a reflection of ourselves when we look across the Atlantic.'

TUE BIERING

Text, Direction Tue Biering **Choreography, Co-Direction** Nhlanhla Mahlangu **With** Bongani Bennedict Masango, Joe Young, Kaygee Letsholonyana, Lillian Tshabalala-Malulyck, Mandla Gaduka, Siyambonga Alfred Mdubeki, Thulani Zwane **Set design** Johan Kølckær **Sound design** Ditlev Brinth **Light design** Christoffer Gulløv **Props design** Marie Rosendahl Chemnitz **Costume design** Camilla Lind **Video design** Rasmus Kreiner **International production and management** Annette Max Hansen **Production management** Thomas Dotzler **Stage management** Svante Huniche Corell **Sound management, Operation** Theo Hector **Assistance direction** Katinka Hurvig Møller **Costume management** Sofie Bonde Lenau **Executive producer for Dark Noon International & GHP** Glynis Hall **Producer for Dark Noon International & The Pleasance** Anthony Alderson **Associate producer** Juliette Stark **Translation surtitles (German)** Katharina Bader **Surtitles** Isolde Schmitt

Production fix+foxy, Glynis Henderson Productions, The Pleasance and Republique **Funded by** Statens Kunstfond (Denmark), Bikubenfond (Denmark), Beckett-Foundation (Denmark) **General management for Dark Noon International & GHP** Camilla King **International Bookings & Presentations** Glynis Henderson Productions ghmp.co.uk

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna
World Premiere May 2019, Revolver & Republique/Østerbro Teater (Copenhagen)

WESTERN IN THEATRE

INTERVIEW WITH TUE BIERING

How did the two of you get to know each other as directors, and how did your collaboration start?

I heard from another South African choreographer by chance about this artist who was a fantastic choreographer and composer with great integrity but also with great humour and a desire to work with complexity and very different points of view. His name was Nhlanhla. I wrote to him and he happened to be on tour in Europe. So I went directly to Germany and met him in his hotel and shortly afterwards we were sitting on the floor in a hotel lobby with our calendars and were planning the process for *Dark Noon*.

Can you describe the context in which you made *Dark Noon*? What was the starting point?

I wanted to make a performance about migration to Europe and the stereotypical European view of the continent of Africa. It was to be told through classic Wild West narratives: people living on the edge of civilisation where lawlessness reigns and everything is very binary – the good versus the bad. I find that the stereotypical narratives of

Westerns have parallels to the general European perception of Africa. That was the starting point, but when I met Nhlanhla and we worked with this fantastic cast of actors, I came to realise that perhaps I was reproducing a pattern that I had wanted to break. I was just another white European artist who wanted to tell the story of Africa, like so many before me, and I didn't want to repeat that. So I suggested that we switch roles and that the cast tell the story of European migration. With that approach, we were able to work with multiple layers where South Africa and the actors' personal relationships to the material have a constant presence as a subtext.

How do you divide the work in rehearsal?

That was actually very simple because Nhlanhla is a choreographer and composer and he was very much into the physical and musical aspects and I was into the text and directing. It was an incredibly good collaboration because we had the same ideas and Nhlanhla is so incredibly talented and was able to translate a lot of my ideas into something I would never have been able to do myself.

Where do you actually disagree – on stage, on aesthetics, on what the piece should do?

I don't know if we disagreed at any time. I think it has been one long process of collective creative work together with the cast and the rest of the artistic team. I think the strength is that we really like each other's work and I admire Nhlanhla's approach and practice. I often refer to this specific production and its process because it really is a benchmark for me regarding the perfect collaborative process.

***Dark Noon* draws a great deal from Western movies. Is there one particular film that served as an inspiration?**

I saw a ton of Western movies. I really wanted to find the one film to build on and refer to. But the Western movie genre has an enormous amount of sub-genres: the Westerns about the civil war, the 'cowboys & Indians' Westerns, the films with one lonely rider who restores order in a corrupt and lawless city, Westerns about settlers, etc.

I must admit that I was close to panicking. But then I started reading books about the history of the United States instead and realised that it was the historical documentary facts that were my script, staged with our collective references to Western films. And then it was important to me that it was not about Americans. It was about Europeans – because when we talk about the United States we often forget that it is a country that stems from European mentality and culture. I think it is important that we are

looking at a reflection of ourselves when we look across the Atlantic.

What fascinates you about the Western as a genre?

What really fascinates me now is that films where violence and weapons are used as a solution to conflicts still hold an allure. I can't help but think that it describes an inherent urge that we all carry around, but obviously don't live out on a daily basis.

The Western genre has seen a revival in recent years. Maybe it never left. Why do you think the genre keeps returning or has kept its presence?

Westerns are often set in an existentially vulnerable environment. The living conditions are harsh and there are pretty harsh consequences to the choices you make. The characters' existence is constantly up for negotiation. It's very potent and has all the essential elements of a good drama.

What can theatre do with the Western genre that film simply cannot?

I don't know. I haven't thought about that and I really don't know if it interests me to know. But what I find amazing about theatre – and it is the reason I work with theatre – is that audience and performers spend time together in the same room. This physical meeting between people has so much potential and I will never ever stop exploring all the possible ways to exploit that.

You tell the story of the colonisation of the territory that is now known as the USA – but with South African actors, with performers who come from a context that knows very well what it means to be colonised. What does this shift in perspective do for the piece?

I think it's absolutely crucial to have that layer. All the scenes relate to the actors' personal experiences or something that has also happened in South Africa in recent times. The cast and Nhlanhla established a personal demand for each line and situation. Everyone involved has a reference and that's what makes it so powerful for us as an audience to watch and what makes it so important for the actors to play.

For the performers, this is not just a metaphor: it is also a story about their own history. How did that show up in rehearsals?

It was part of the working process that we bring into play all the themes from the history of European emigration and from Western films and then ask where those themes resonate in a South African context.

The show has toured extensively. Does it change from city to city, from audience to audience, and has any particular moment on tour taken you by surprise?

I don't know if it surprised me, but the reception in South Carolina stands out from the rest. It was a combination of people with deep gratitude towards us for telling their story in a way they hadn't seen before and people who were extremely angry and furious. In one of the performances in South Carolina, a member of the audience left loudly, shouting all kinds of swearwords. It happened to be one of Donald Trump's lawyers. I believe the performance did hit a nerve somewhere.

BIOGRAPHIES

Tue Biering is an award-winning Danish theatre director, playwright, and artistic director of fix+foxy, which he founded together with dramaturg Jeppe Kristensen. His work operates at the intersection of documentary practice and fiction, rigorously questioning social realities and the narratives we construct around them. Biering has directed more than 30 productions for major Danish theatres and played a key role in establishing Turbinehallerne at the Royal Danish Theatre. His work has received numerous awards, including the Reumert Honorary Award (2021) and the Royal Cultural Honorary Prize (2022).

Nhlanhla Mahlangu is an internationally acclaimed choreographer and multidisciplinary artist working across dance, music, theatre, and composition. His work has been presented across the globe and is marked by a distinctive fusion of contemporary expression with deeply rooted traditional forms, driven by rhythm, voice, and physical intensity. A generous collaborator, he has worked with artists such as William Kentridge, Sylvia Glasser, and Hugh Masekela. He is involved in Kentridge's *Sibyl* as both performer and composer, which was presented at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) in 2023.

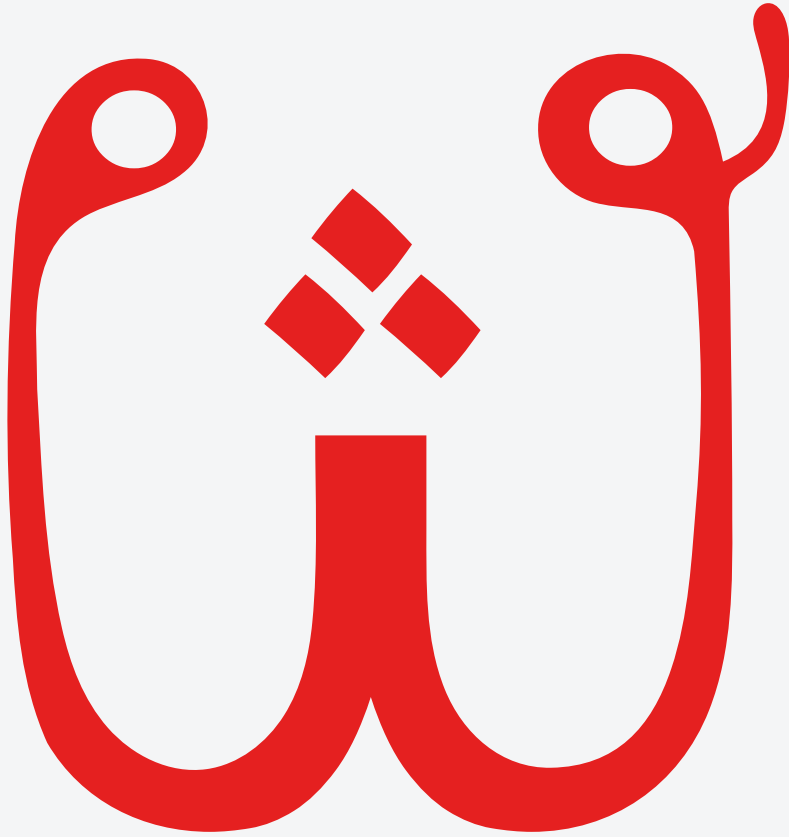
For more than two decades, **fix+foxy** has been creating original works across theatre, sound performance, and digital formats. Their practice is driven by a radical curiosity about society: who is visible, and who is not? Their productions often feature people rarely represented on stage, including children, refugees, and marginalized communities. Through playful and accessible formats, they craft complex narratives that challenge perception and invite real encounters. Their work moves between documentary approaches and traditional staging with professional actors – always marked by unpredictability, humor, and a sharp political edge.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

Owner, Editor and Publisher Wiener Festwochen GesmbH, Lehnargasse 11/1/6, 1060 Wien, T + 43 1 589 22 0, festwochen@festwochen.at | www.festwochen.at **General Management** Milo Rau, Artemis Vakianis **Artistic Direction** (responsible for the content) Milo Rau, Artistic Direction **Picture Credits Cover** © Søren Meisner **Produced by** Print Alliance HAV Produktions GmbH (Bad Vöslau) **Design** SIRENE Studio Layout Valerie Eccli

15 MAY –
21 JUNE 2026

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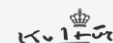
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The performances in Vienna are supported by the Ministry of
Culture Denmark and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.